

Take only pictures.... leave only footprints

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Introduction

“Tourism is the fastest growing global industry. Its economic power is enormous and generates ever greater political influence at national and international levels. Governments, associated industries and presumed beneficiary communities see tourism as a route to economic prosperity and are often strong advocates for further tourism development. Those involved in the industry are invariably advocates for continual growth, simply out of self-interest. On the other side of the ledger are concerns about the negative effects of tourism. These include disjunction of existing social and economic systems, shifts in power relationships and environmental effects, often substantial and irreversible. Whether the effects of tourism are viewed as negative or positive depends of course on one’s place in the scheme of things” (ASOC?)

Tourism in Antarctica is well established, with exponential growth of visitor numbers over recent years. This growth has been a concern amongst the various participants in the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS), tourist operators, NGOs and scientists, all have voiced concerns regarding the potential and actual impacts of tourism to the continent.

This review will compare the differing perspectives of tourism in Antarctica by:

- ❖ reviewing the definition of tourism and tourists
- ❖ examining the current legal and regulatory tourism management system.
- ❖ reviewing the history and development of tourism in Antarctica
- ❖ examining the potential impacts of tourism.

When discussing, reading or reviewing anything about Antarctica it is necessary to establish which group of people should be called as Antarctic tourists. Antarctica doesn't have any residents in that everyone who goes is a visitor for a short time. The two main groups of visitors who can have an impact on Antarctica are tourists and those who go as part of a National Antarctic programme. The World Tourism Organisation defines tourists as people who "travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited" (wikipedia) . It could therefore be stated that all visitors to Antarctica are tourists as all are involved in recreation at some point during their time on the continent and also scientists and support staff based at the stations could be classified as business travelers since they are not remunerated from within the country visited and largely stay less than one year. However, Reich (1979) proposes that in the Antarctic context that commercial tourism for example the people who pay (or goodwill/VIP visits) to participate in Antarctic cruises, flights and specialist expeditions that can be identified as true tourist.

Antarctic tourism is governed by the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 and its associated agreements, measures and recommendations that make up the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS). The history of the ATS is well documented, a summary of which can be found in the Antarctica NZ Information Sheet- History of the Antarctic Treaty (2003). The Treaty has as its primary objective the setting aside of Antarctica to be used for peaceful purposes only, and through Article IV all political claims to the territory below 60 degrees south were frozen by the agreement of the parties and no new claims or enlargements of existing claims are permitted. It has been suggested that this agreement to disagree has been one of the secrets to the on-going success of the Treaty (Bastmeijer and Roura 2004). Several committees have been developed through the ATS in particular with reference to tourism the Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP). Many regulations were passed throughout the 1970's and 1980's associated with tourism although many were ad hoc and reactionary (Tracey 2001) In 1975 the concept of Areas of Special Tourist Interest was introduced and a statement of Accepted Practices and the Relevant Provisions of the Antarctic Treaty was also

developed for use by the tourism operators. However, no ASTIs were ever designated and discussions about tourism focused mainly on technical issues. But as tourist numbers began to increase and the growing awareness of the actual and potential damage occurring in the continent the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties (ATCP) recognised the need for an environmental management system that included tourism issues and eventually the Madrid Protocol 1991 was established. The Protocol now constitutes the main environmental protection instrument of the ATS according to Tracey (2001). The Protocol applies to all human activities in the Treaty area, including the ATCP national science programmes, individuals, companies and NGOs. The objective of the Protocol “is the comprehensive protection of Antarctic environment and dependent and associated ecosystems and hereby designate Antarctica as a natural reserve”. Article 3 provides the environmental principles-“ the protection of the Antarctic environment and the intrinsic value of Antarctica, including its wilderness and aesthetic values. Articles 3 also includes that human activities are to be planned and conducted so as to limit adverse and cumulative effects. Central to achieving these principles is the concept of impact assessment prior to the commencement of the activities. Section 4 of Article 3 notes that all tourism activities shall take place in a manner consistent with the principles of Article 3 and shall be modified, suspended or cancelled if they result in or have the potential to result in impacts on the Antarctic environment. Of note, each of the ATCP nations are required to establish appropriate procedures for assessments for activities related to that nation. (ATS 1991) Although it was soon realised that a separate Annex would be needed to regulate tourism. This never eventuated and since then the ATCPs have gone back to a rather low-key and ad hoc approach to tourism regulation (Richardson 1999)

Tourism operators who conduct activities in the ATS area also have developed a system for self-regulation carried put by the International Association of Antarctic Tourism Operators (IAATO), formed in 1991 by the seven original tourism operators to “promote safe, appropriate and environmentally sound private sector travel to Antarctic destinations” (IAATO 2005) Operators are mostly from the cruise ship sector although there are also land based and aircraft companies as members.

In 1990, IAATO developed the first set of industry guidelines resulting in a formal invitation to attend ATCMS from 1992. In 1994, at the XVIII ATCM in Kyoto were used as the basis for Recommendation XVIII-I “Guidance for Visitors to the Antarctic and Guidance for those Conducting Tourism and Non-Governmental Activities in Antarctica” (IAATO 2005)

Antarctic tourism began in the 1950 with dedicated cruise ships landing tourists on the Antarctic Peninsula by the Argentinean vessel “ Les Eclaireurs”. (Maher 2005) From that point ship borne tourism has gradually increased, although Headland (1994) notes that modern ship based tourism began with the Linblad Explorer in 1970. The Linblad Way introduced by Lars-Eric Linblad style of expedition is still the primary approach to this day. It consists of ships of about 140 passengers, guided ashore and afloat by experienced staff. Each voyage becomes an expedition with lectures, briefings and shore landings. The majority of tourism is ship based visits such as this to the Antarctic Peninsula to view unique wildlife and historic sites. Most Antarctic tourists embark at either Puntas Arenas in Chile or Ushuaia in Argentina in vessels ranging from comfortable cruise ships to expedition type yachts or in a variety of ice strengthened Russian research vessels and icebreakers. The availability of these vessels from the 1990s and the increasing use of ship borne helicopters has significantly increased the volume and scope of sea borne tourism options and the range of sites that can be reached (Cessford1998)

Although there are some vessels that leave from NZ and Australia, these are mainly to the Ross Sea region. The longer sea time raises travel costs and reduces the proportion of time spent ashore, is less comfortable for passengers and limits the type of vessels that can be used.

Aircraft also operate from South America, concentrating on the growing and diversifying market for carrying small numbers of adventure orientated tourists to inland sites for climbing, skiing and wilderness expeditions.

The impacts of tourism are felt in many destinations around the world, these impacts have been generally well researched and discussed in academic and

other literature but, according to Hoffman and Jatkco 2000, the impacts of tourism in Antarctica are relatively less well researched, probably due to the small size of the sector and the limited opportunities for researchers to observe tourism activities directly. There are positive impacts associated with tourism, Inskeep 1991 includes conservation of important natural areas and archeological and historic sites, improvement in environmental quality, enhancement of the environment and increasing environmental awareness. However, from the literature available it is possible to identify common themes of potential and actual impact such as physical damage to the landscape, interference with wildlife, introduction of weeds and diseases, marine pollution and introduction of non- endemic marine organisms, impacts on historic artefacts, interference with ATCP science programmes and safety issues. As already mentioned the majority of tourism activity takes place in a relatively small number of sites and, according to Cessner, 1998 the “localised impacts of tourism on features at Antarctic sites should be seen in the wider context of natural environmental fluctuations, global and regional human activities and the on-going localised effects of station operations and science programmes”. Headland (1994) compared the relative tourist and non-tourist presence days in Antarctic environments and estimated that less than 1% of direct human effects in Antarctica could be attributed to tourists. Personnel associated with science programmes are just as likely to introduce alien species and diseases to specific sites as tourists are. However, according to IAATO (2005) “the juxtaposition of high density breeding areas and a concentration of human activity as specific points throughout Antarctica has, inevitably, provoked concern over ecological disturbance”. However, Cessner 1998, states that “the most pervasive impact form tourism has been actually on the operation of the stations, this can be positive in that it allows a more direct advocacy of the research being done to an interested audience and provides opportunities for generating revenue. But, as the number of visitors increases, the physical disturbance of station operations and scientific programmes has become particularly acute at stations on the Antarctic Peninsula.”

Much has been written and said about the alleged impacts of tourists in the Antarctic environment and, tourism has frequently been portrayed in the

popular media as an activity that is threatening the relatively pristine nature of Antarctica. Many popular press writers predict a gloomy future for the continent if tourism is allowed to grow as many portray a fragile environment being invaded by a rapacious tourism industry that will stop at nothing to invade Antarctica (Mortimer 2004). Much of the literature concentrates on the impacts of flora and fauna as well as on the scientific research stations. Academic and scientific writers, due to the lack of empirical research and data emphasise the potential of real impacts. Hall, 1992 believes the most serious concerns are focussed on the potential impacts of ship based tourism as “transient environmental effects, although pressure may be placed on regularly visited attractions; oil spills; disturbance to wildlife; potential introduction of bird and plant diseases; introduction of exotic flora”. Law, 1989 points out environmentally, the dangers of tourism are exaggerated and that most of Antarctica will always be inaccessible to tourists. He states that he does not see tourism threatening the future as a whole. At the same time, he cautions that in areas where tourism does take place, a careful control of the tourists will be necessary.

Thoughts from the review

Wherever there is human endeavour there will always be an impact and the risk of accidents and wherever there is risk and impacts there will always be debate about whether tourism is good or bad. Antarctica is a hostile and dangerous environment for tourism operations, Bahia Paraiso and more recently The Explorer disasters for example. There are reported incidents of localised impacts on the flora and fauna but in the greater scheme of things these could be classed as minimal, but it is the overall cumulative effects of these impacts that is the cause for concern. Tourists who pay large amounts of money to experience Antarctica are motivated to preserve the pristine environment that they have travelled to see and that they will become ambassadors for the protection of the continent. However, the growing numbers of tourism according to ASOC ushers in a change in attitude towards Antarctica, in that Antarctica is now just another tourist destination, rather than a special region deserving special protection, and that last years Antarctic

experience will not be sufficient and new thrills will be required (already witnessed by the growing experience expeditions). But, ASOC asserts that “Antarctica is not the same as everywhere else and that the universal trend in tourism behaviour need not be accepted as fait accompli. The ultimate tragedy, the paradox of tourism occurs when tourism destroys the very thing it came to see.”

The last number of years has seen a change in the Antarctic tourism industry with larger companies and multinationals replacing the smaller owner operator. This is reflected in the increasing interest of mass tourism approaches with larger, general purpose vessels, the Sea Princess Cruise, use of aircraft for intercontinental transportation, discussion of hotel facilities on shore and the development of specialist adventure tourism events and guided risk experiences (ASOC). The lack of strategic overview for tourism management in Antarctica could allow for commercial interest to become the organising principle. Although there is some progress towards a comprehensive management system such as the development of management plans for the ASPA (Antarctic Specially protected Area) and ASMA (Antarctic Specially Managed Site), along with ATCM such as Environmental Impact Assessments and IAATO initiatives, have started to develop specific guidelines for tourist landing sites. These are sound initiatives however their effectiveness is constrained by a lack of context of strategy, policy, aims and objectives (Mayer 2004).

A number of researches and commentators have raised questions over the adequacy and legality of the formal instruments of the ATS tourism management system. The main issue relates to what extent to which the Recommendations and other legal ATS instruments effect Treaty parties of different consultative status and how in turn that enables control and management of tourism operators of different types. Richardson, 1999 illustrates the complexity” Tour companies may be registered in one country, operating from another, and marketing widely internationally whilst also sub contracting to a third- party company based elsewhere. The vessels they own may be owned, chartered or sub-chartered. They may be flagged either with Treaty or non- Treaty Parties whilst tourists themselves may be a wide spectrum of nationalities. Set against this international kaleidoscope it is

difficult to envisage any wholly effective regulatory regime reliant on the normal jurisdictions over flag vessels, nationals or territory”

ASOC also claim that the issue of unresolved sovereignty and consequential complex juridical situation means that the emergence of an ever larger and more powerful industry poses real risks, as there is a temptation for states to attempt to strengthen their sovereignty claims as they consider stakes in the two major Antarctic industries: fishing and tourism.

One thing for certain is that Antarctic tourism is here to stay, and will only increase in as it becomes more self perpetuating: more operators equals a decrease in cost therefore an increase in accessibility. Antarctica has always and will always be the place for adventurous, curious and exceptional people, but the future success of tourism will be measured by the satisfaction of paying visitors with their experience and by the degree of protection that the environment receives. To maximise visitor satisfaction and environmental protection, it is imperative that the cooperation between international tour operators, Antarctic Treaty Parties and tourists is further developed and strengthened. (Bauer 2001)

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IAATO- International Association of Antarctic Tourist Operators

Antarctic Treaty System 1959

ASOC- The Antarctic and Southern Coalition- Tourism the Global Industry.